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ABSTRACT

The Early Childhood Prevention Project (ECP) is an innovative effort to integrate psychosocial and educational approaches for promoting children's healthy development in elementary school. ECP takes a holistic approach to the prevention of academic and psychosocial problems and the promotion of students' educational and interpersonal development. A collaborative systems model is employed. The primary objectives of the project are described under headings of service, training, and staff development. Four central activities are diagramed as the "Pyramid of Prevention Services": (1) whole-classroom interventions; (2) small academic and social skills groups; (3) pair counseling to foster friendship-making skills; and (4) individual tutoring and mentoring. Service activities are carried out by master's level interns, and an innovative intern-training model is an integral part of the project. ECP aims to create a new breed of social service professional, one who integrates educational, social, and developmental objectives into innovative multi-disciplinary, multi-modal programs. ECP program evaluation focuses upon the participant's qualitative experience of the process of the project and investigates the personal meaning of participating in the project for each of the involved groups. Changes in the intern program in response to evaluation findings are reported. (EMK)

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ECP: Enhancing Psychosocial and Academic Development in Elementary Schools

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Poster Presentation, American Psychological Association Convention

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ABSTRACT

The Early Childhood Prevention Project (ECP) is an innovative effort to integrate psychosocial and educational approaches for promoting children's healthy development in elementary school. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education Secretary's Fund for the Improvement of Education, ECP is a collaboration between the Judge Baker Children's Center, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the Boston Public Schools. The project has three primary objectives:

(1) **Service.** To foster the academic, psychological, and interpersonal development of young children in school, toward the promotion of their investment in their own potential and the reduction of the likelihood of future risk-taking behavior;

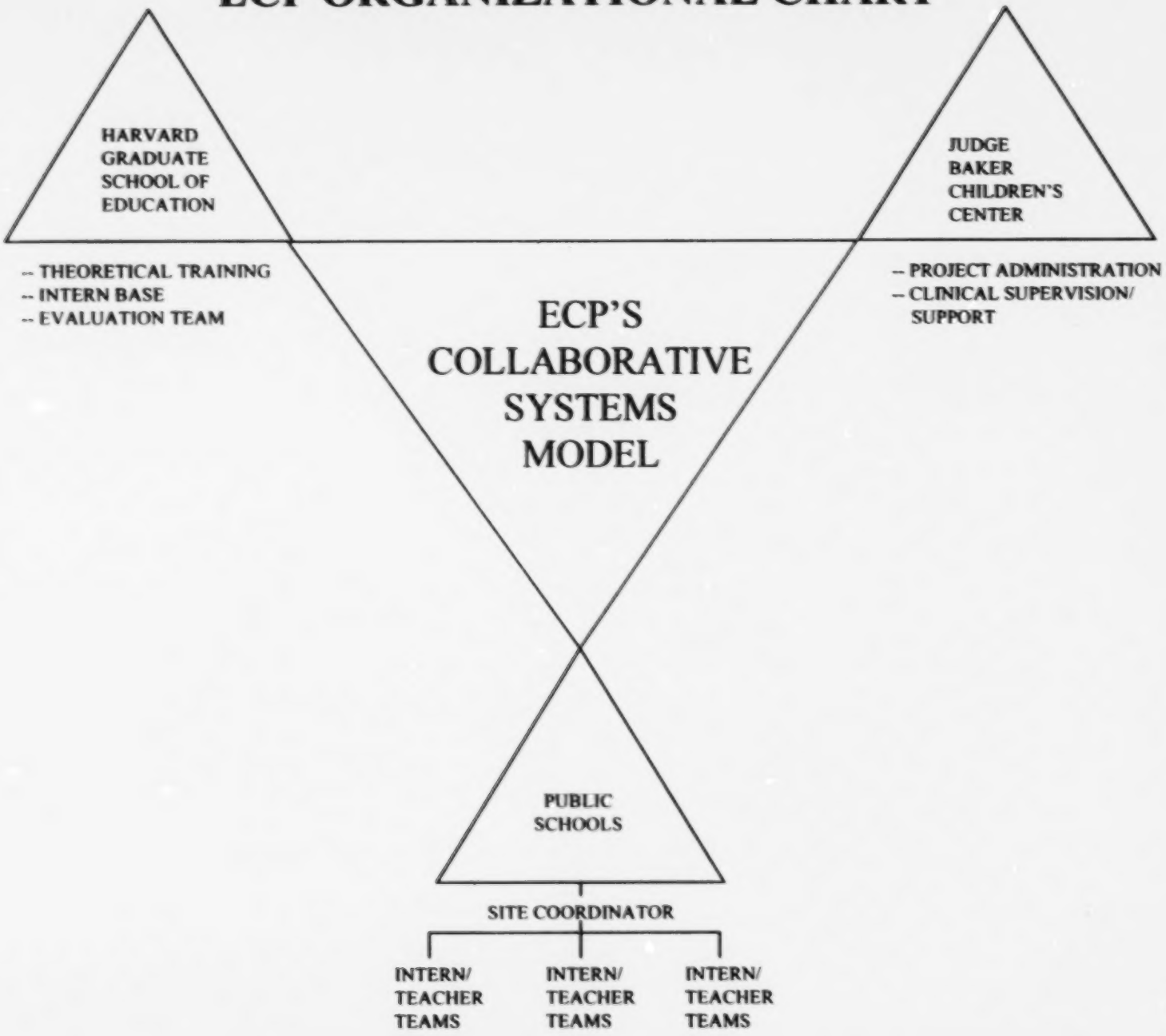
(2) **Training.** To provide a theoretical framework, practical skills, and supervision – and opportunities for career advancement – for a new cadre of professionals who wish to bridge educational and psychosocial approaches to create innovative support programs for children;

(3) **Staff Development.** To serve as a professional support and development model for teachers, to enhance classroom and school environments that nurture children's healthy development.

ECP has four central activities forming the "Pyramid of Prevention Services": (1) whole-classroom interventions; (2) small academic and social skills groups; (3) pair counseling to foster friendship-making skills; and (4) individual tutoring/mentoring. Project activities are carried out by master's level interns.

The poster presentation will describe the philosophy and practice of ECP, with a further concentration upon the training of master's level professionals in integrative strategies for risk prevention and growth enhancement.

ECP ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

The Early Childhood Prevention Project (ECP) takes a holistic approach to the prevention of academic and psychosocial problems and the promotion of students' educational and interpersonal development. Rather than solely targeting isolated behaviors such as fighting, the project's components attempt to address underlying risk factors for this behavior such as isolation from peers, low tolerance for frustration, and attentional difficulties. Furthermore, ECP employs a dramatic shift away from a focus on individual therapy for only the most troubled (or troublesome) students, toward a broader prevention model that reaches a greater number of at-risk students. Instead of using a traditional individual counseling model that takes children out of the classroom environment one at a time to meet with a counselor, the ECP model integrates counseling goals within the larger educational and developmental philosophy of the elementary school. Much of our work takes place in the classroom or in group settings, where children have the opportunity to explore interpersonal and individual concerns with their peers and to link this exploration with their educational growth and productivity. By focusing on our youngest students at the elementary age, ECP is able to identify students before they establish patterns of high risk activity (fighting, substance abuse, school failure) that may be too entrenched later to prevent or reverse.

The project has four central activities forming the "Pyramid of Prevention Services": (1) whole-classroom interventions, including the Voices of Love and Freedom curriculum; (2) small academic and social skills groups; (3) pair counseling to foster friendship-making skills; and (4) individual tutoring/mentoring. These activities are carried out by master's interns from the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Risk and Prevention Program, who come to the school two days a week. The pyramid services can be tailored to the needs of a given classroom: the interns and staff together decide which children would benefit from which services, and how and when these services will be integrated into the academic day. The services can be individualized as well to meet the needs of a specific child. The tiers of the pyramid are designed to build upon one another, to reinforce the goals of building academic skills; developing interpersonal and social competencies, specifically in relationships with peers and with important adults; and fostering children's awareness of self and appreciation of others.

In this model, we endeavor to work closely with specific staff over the course of a year to help develop a classroom environment that nurtures children's growth beyond their academic skills. Each intern works with one or two partner teachers in a reciprocal training process. The teachers

offer expertise in their own classroom approach and philosophy; the interns bring their diverse experiences and the knowledge base collected in their academic training at Harvard. Throughout the year together, the interns and staff teach one another, consult with one another, and collaborate in the design and delivery of effective services for their students.

The fundamental goal of the ECP project is to reduce children's vulnerability to risk. Our route to this goal is through enhancing children's sense of connection: to peers and helping adults; to family and community; to their own feelings and ideas, and to their competence in expressing themselves to others; and to their sense of their own future, and their engagement in the enterprise of growing up to realize that future. It is our philosophy that these connections to self and other enhance young children's resistance to future risk-taking behavior by promoting their confidence in their own resilience and healthy potential. Thus, while ECP is described – even in its name – as a prevention project, it is more essentially a *strength promotion and enhancement project*, where our primary emphasis is to locate and nurture a sense of competence in all children as they begin their school careers, toward their own awareness, activation, and mastery of their capabilities.

The Pyramid of Prevention Services

Individual Tutoring/ Mentoring focuses on the immediate and long-term educational needs of a particular student.
Pair Counseling uses the context of an interpersonal relationship between two children of the same age and gender to build their understanding of others, foster their friendship-making skills, and encourage the negotiation of conflict.
The **Small Group** intervention provides a context for both educational and social skills support. A group of up to seven students meets once a week to play educational and cooperative games that reinforce school-readiness skills such as listening and following directions, and that promote social skills such as sharing, turn-taking and self-expression
Whole-Class Activities include a variety of large and small group interventions designed to build community in the classroom and to support students' social and emotional growth. One central activity is *Voices of Love and Freedom*, a multi-cultural ethics, literacy and prevention curriculum which seeks to promote healthy interpersonal relationships and to decrease risk-taking behavior among students. This program uses the vehicle of children's literature as well as students' and teachers' personal stories to encourage the exploration of relationships with themselves and their families, friends, and communities.

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INTERN TRAINING MODEL

ECP is founded upon the belief that schools are primary avenues of access to support services for children and their families. Further, academic achievement is valued both as an important educational outcome measure and as a critical aspect of children's resilience against future psychosocial problems. As a result, we believe that innovative service programs for children must be integrated with innovative training models that teach young professionals to collaborate with schools and to create programs that foster growth and change. ***The ECP project aims to create a new breed of social service professional, one who integrates educational, social, and developmental objectives into innovative multi-disciplinary, multi-modal programs.*** Such programs are designed to address academic, interpersonal, and environmental stressors as "risks to learning" that can potentially have wide-reaching negative effects upon children's futures.

The multiple services that comprise the ECP Pyramid of Prevention are implemented by masters' level interns from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who are being trained in intervention and prevention approaches toward the reduction of high risk behavior in children and the promotion of healthy development. The service goals of the ECP project recognize the importance of ***service-as-training***, where the foundation of the interns' training experience is the two days per week spent in the schools working with teachers and children.

The pyramid structure of the services delivered by ECP is mirrored in the structure of the training and supervision provided for the participating interns. The supplemental components of the training program are grounded in the interns' day-to-day learning in the school environment, where they practice new skills and incorporate lessons from their interactions with staff and students. On top of the two-day per week site requirement, the interns take part in:

Training Seminar: This weekly seminar provides a theoretical framework for interns' practice as well as practical skills training in the Pyramid services. The seminar also establishes a community among the interns working at different schools, for sharing experiences, offering encouragement and support, and creating a sense of a larger whole among the group of growing professionals.

Peer Supervision: Site coordinators serve as peer supervisors and mentors for the first-year interns. Each ECP site coordinator -- the project administrator at a school -- conducts weekly meetings with his/her group of interns. The purpose of these peer supervision sessions is to offer pragmatic supervision to interns from a staff member just senior to them, who is also working in their school environment. These sessions may address issues that arise in the

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The ECP evaluation focuses upon ***the participant's qualitative experience of the process of the project,*** with the premise that in order to be effective in shaping student, teacher, and intern attitudes and behavior, all participants must find the project enjoyable, meaningful, relevant to daily life, and motivating. This hypothesis is derived from research conducted at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education on the personal meaning of risk-taking behavior, which suggests that interventions that are designed to impact risk-taking should address not only one's knowledge about risk, and the way one manages social situations involving risk, but most critically the personal meaning the behavior and its consequences has for any individual. Our evaluation investigates ***the personal meaning of participating in the ECP project for each of the involved groups,*** towards assessing the project's influence in shaping how participants think, feel and act.

The ECP Intern Questionnaire and Teacher Questionnaire, developed by the ECP evaluation team, are administered in the fall, before the project is fully underway in classrooms. The instruments have a parallel structure, to allow for direct comparisons on specific items. The Intern Questionnaire consists of four main sections of multiple choice or open-ended questions. The sections explore the following domains:

(1) School and school system ("The members of the staff at my school work together as a team.");

(2) Parent contact ("I am satisfied with the amount and quality of the parent contact I have.");

(3) Teacher philosophy ("My most important goals in teaching are…", "Some strengths that my students bring to the classroom are…"); and

(4) Goals and expectations of the ECP Project.

The last section includes questions about the intern's expectations of ECP's performance in terms of the intern's needs; the needs of the students; the intern's perception of her role in the project; the intern's understanding of the intern's role; the intern's investment in the project

At the end of the year, the interns talked about the engaging and enhancing experiences they had in working with the children, in teaching, and in group, pair and individual counseling. Supervision was a very positive experience for the interns, providing perspective and intensive support. The intern training seminar was also an enriching experience for the interns. One intern said, "Very, very good content. Most interesting and challenging class."

These quotes illustrate the meaning the interns have made from their experience:

"My primary goals were to get hands-on training with kids. To get my feet wet in teaching. To get my feet wet in counseling. To have those experiences underneath my belt. I had a lot of research experience and I wanted the hands-on experience and it totally fulfilled that. I liked the idea of ECP being a balance between working in a classroom and doing counseling. I decided I wanted to work at a school and I wanted a lot of structure and a lot of supervision. [The training] is exactly what I wanted to prepare me for a teaching career. I was hoping to get a sense if I wanted to teach or not, get a sense if I wanted to do counseling or not. I am still not sure, but I have a better sense of exactly what they are."

"[I participated in ECP] because I love kids. I love hanging out with kids. And every part of why I wanted to be part of ECP happened. I got to spend time and make really strong and important connections with these kids. And the experience was incredible. Not only being with children, but the practical experience of having counseling experience and supervision and training. It is just really great. ECP has been the best part of my Harvard experience. I don't think that all my classes combined matches what I've learned in this program. Not all of it was great, what I learned, but it was definitely more than I could have in the classroom cause there is so much to be said for experience."

"Yeah, I definitely notice a big difference [in my approach to working with children]. I have elementary school experience and I notice a big difference from how I interacted with the kids then and how I interact with the kids now. And in terms of support, and being caring and loving. And working together instead of in opposition with each other. That an adult can be a child's friend. Instead of just an adult. Yeah, I think my experience here had made incredible changes in how I see my relationship with children and it's definitely increased my confidence. And that I feel that I can effect change. Positive change in kids."

goals; the desired outcomes by year's end; and the intern's personal and professional aims for her participation in ECP.

The Teacher Questionnaire sections and items are similar, with the obvious shift in focus upon the teacher's perceptions of her role, of the intern's role, of the project's outcomes for teachers, interns, and students, and of her own professional development aims and goals. At year's end, interns and teachers complete a follow-up questionnaire, with comparable items that assess their experience with the project over the year, based on the expectations described in the pre-program assessment.

Each intern and teacher is also interviewed at the end of each project year, according to a semi-structured interview protocol that is designed to elicit further exploration of a participant's experience in the project and the meaning s/he derived from it. The interview intentionally prompts for more personal self-reflection than the questionnaire, to encourage interns and teachers to make connections between their initial expectations coming into the project, their actual experience with ECP, and their long-term personal and professional development. For all participants – students as well as interns and teachers – the positive effects of ECP are predicated upon each individual's internalization of the ECP goals and activities, and the individual's investment in the project as relevant to his/her own growth. Through questions such as, "Has ECP affected the way you deal with interpersonal issues with children?" and "How has the training you have received prepared you for your future career?," the interview component of the evaluation attempts to provide each participant with the opportunity to make these connections.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY INTERN NEEDS?

After two years of our three-year grant period, and with the clarification provided by the intern evaluation questionnaires and interviews, we have refined our intern training model to meet the practical, intellectual, and interpersonal support requirements of masters' students seeking a rigorous, integrative, pre-professional training experience. From our experience, we have drawn the following conclusions in response to the question, "What are the primary training needs for interns?"

(1) Structure: A clear sequence of expectations and responsibilities, with a correlating delineation of the personnel to whom the intern can turn for guidance and feedback.

(2) Supervision: Regular, scheduled opportunities for reflection, support, and guided development, provided in a variety of contexts (one-on-one, small group). Diversity of contexts affords interns a range of perspectives on their work, as well as varying opportunities for relationship-building within their training experience.

(3) Professional Role Clarification: Intensive exposure to a professional experience while still in a supported training capacity, which allows interns to learn first-hand the realities of a potential career before undertaking its full responsibilities.

(4) Direct Experience: On-site practice over an extended time period, allowing interns to translate training theory into action, and further, to draw from actual experience to formulate a framework for their own practice.

These four components are integrated in the ECP Intern Training Model, each one building upon and contributing to the others. The absence of any aspect of this framework weakens the impact of the other components, and thus dilutes the overall quality of the trainees' experience.

school community, among the school staff or the students, to help interns learn to devise a response to such issues that is in accord with the larger student support structure of the specific school.

Clinical Supervision: All interns (and site coordinators) are overseen by a licensed psychologist or licensed social worker from the Judge Baker Children's Center. They receive weekly supervision in teams of two, determined by the intern's school and grade level placement. This level of supervision provides an opportunity for the interns to develop more in-depth assessment and intervention skills, applicable most specifically to the counseling-oriented components of ECP but also essential for the interns' involvement with the students in all domains.

Through this design, the interns are exposed to multiple perspectives from different levels of expertise and experience, and a variety of professional/career development models.

INTERN TRAINING – EVALUATION RESULTS

At the beginning of the year, the interns stated that their most important goals for being involved in ECP were:

(1) to develop counseling and teaching skills,

(2) to have a positive affect on the children,

(3) to assess their own strengths and weaknesses in this field, and

(4) to promote collaborations between the ECP Project and the educators at the schools.

These quotes illustrate the needs the interns identified at the beginning of the year:

"To get into a classroom where I can work with kids in a role other than a teacher who is giving them subject material. I'd like to help kids to see school as a place where there's more than just assignments on paper and that learning can happen in many different ways."

"To be effective within the ECP program in promoting communication/ collaboration between teachers and the program and supporting children who are at-risk by building on their strengths. To improve my communication skills with teachers, parents, and improve communication, counseling, and teaching skills with children."

"I was interested in the program because of the breadth of services it provides for students - this would give me a broad base of experience (i.e. working in a public school, in the classroom, as a counselor, etc.)."

"I wanted the opportunity to carry out multiple tasks - teaching VLF, leading groups and working with pairs in addition to providing teacher and peer support."